

Introduction to Modern Political Theory



Government 1615
Spring 2014
MWF 11:15-12:05
[GSH 64](#)

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Course Description

This course offers a survey of modern political thought in the West. We will examine some of the persistent dilemmas of political modernity and the attempts of several canonical political theorists to respond to them: Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Burke, Mill, Marx, and Nietzsche. In each case, we will attend to the particular crises these theorists addressed in their work—such as the European wars of religion, the English Civil War, colonialism, the French Revolution, and industrial capitalism—as well as the broader philosophical and political issues they continue to pose to us now. Our approach will be both historical and conceptual, in other words, with the hopes of providing students with a nuanced but clear understanding of political theory as a distinctive form of political inquiry.

Course Mechanics

This is an introductory lecture course. Bring the relevant book to class and be prepared to engage in conversation based on the week's reading. The reading will average around 80 pages a week, and will be accompanied by reading prompts and questions posted on the course blackboard site. Students must attend lectures, and roll will be taken. Students must also attend and participate in a weekly discussion section (sign up the first week of class). Two unexcused absences from section will result in a failing grade, and participation in section discussion will be a part of the final grade (10% of the total). There will be three short paper assignments over the course of the semester (6-7 pages), each worth 25% of the final grade, and an in-class quiz that will be worth 15%. A list of paper topics will be distributed one week before papers are due, along with instructions for formatting and citation. There will be no mid-term and no final exam.

Books to Purchase

Available at Cornell Bookstore:

Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Hackett)
Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Penguin)
John Locke, *Second Treatise on Government* (Hackett)
Peter Bondanella, ed., *The Portable Machiavelli* (Penguin)
Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Oxford)
John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty and the Subjection of Women* (Penguin)
Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (Vintage)
Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *A Discourse on Inequality* (Penguin)
Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (Penguin)

Weekly Readings

* Available on blackboard

Week 1: Introduction: Political Theory and Modernity

Reading: Sheldon Wolin, "Political Philosophy and Philosophy" (recommended)*

January 22 – What is Political Theory?

January 24 – Modernity as a Political Problem

Week 2: Morality and Political Realism

Reading: Machiavelli, *The Prince* (1513), 77-166

January 27 – Machiavelli and Public Life

January 29 – Morality and Power

January 31 – The Art of Politics: Virtù and Fortuna

Week 3: Machiavelli and Republicanism

Reading: Machiavelli, *The Discourses on Livy* (ca. 1517), 168-96, 200-28, 231-38, 243-46, 266-301, 309-313, 342-45, 351-56, 381-83, 389-91, 403-405, 410-412

February 3 – Machiavelli's Use of History

February 5 – Republicanism and Rome

February 7 – Liberty and Political Contestation

Week 4: Hobbes and the Science of Politics

Reading: Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651), 75-118, 147-49, 168-222

February 10 – Hobbes and the English Civil War
February 12 – The Science of Politics
February 14 – The Natural State and the Political Covenant

Week 5: State Sovereignty

Reading: Hobbes, Leviathan (1651), 223-39, 251-74, 311-35, 363-94

February 17 – No Class (February Break)
February 19 – The Liberty of Subjects
February 21 – Sovereignty

Week 6: Liberalism and Rights

Reading: Locke, Second Treatise on Government (1690), 3-68

February 24 – John Locke and Liberalism
February 26 – Property
February 28 – Society
*First paper topics distributed.

Week 7: The Social Contract and Revolution

Reading: Locke, Second Treatise on Government (1690), 68-124

March 3 – The Social Contract and the Liberal State
March 5 – Consent and Authority
March 7 – Revolution and the “Appeal to Heaven”
* First paper due in class.

Week 8: Equality in the Modern Age

Reading: Rousseau, A Discourse on Inequality (1754), 77-137

March 10 – Rousseau and the Ambivalence of Enlightenment
March 12 – Civilization and Inequality
March 14 – Alienation I

Week 9: Democracy and the General Will

Reading: Rousseau, The Social Contract (1762), 49-96, 136-43, 149-51, 176-88

March 17 – Man and Citizen
March 19 – The General Will

March 21 – In-class assignment.

Week 10: Conservatism and the Authority of Tradition

Reading: Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790), 3-77, 84-87, 144-52, 173-74, 217-218

March 24 – Political Theory and the French Revolution: Rousseau and Burke

March 26 – The Authority of Tradition

March 28 – No Class

Week 11: SPRING BREAK

Week 12: Conservatism and its Critics

Reading: Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (selection); Paine, Rights of Man (selection)

April 7 – Radicalism and Violence

April 9 – Burke's Critics: Wollstonecraft and Paine

April 11 – The Age of Revolution

*Second paper topics distributed

Week 13: Liberal Individualism

Reading: Mill, On Liberty (1859), 7-129

April 14 – Mill: Utilitarianism and Romanticism

April 16 – Social Authority and the Harm Principle

April 18 – No Class

*Second paper due.

Week 13: Alienation, Exploitation, and Emancipation

Reading: Marx, On the Jewish Question (1843), 211-42*

April 21 – Marx before Marxism

April 23 – Alienation II

April 25 – Marx's "Jewish Question"

Week 14: History and Class Struggle

Reading: Marx, The Communist Manifesto (1848)

April 28 – Historical Materialism

April 30 – Capitalism and Modernity

May 2 – Theories of Power: Marx and Nietzsche

Week 15: Political Theory after the Death of God

Reading: Nietzsche, The Gay Science (1882), 180-82*; On the Genealogy of Morals (1887), 13-63, 73-79, 116-21, 125-28, 162-63*; Twilight of the Idols (1888), 50-51*

May 5 – Nietzsche and the Death of God

May 7 – Political Theory at Modernity's End: Another Political Realism?

*Final paper due May 16th at 12:00.